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## **Undergraduate peer review, reading and writing: reflecting on experiences from an International Politics module**

### *Abstract*

From academic years 2011-12 until 2015-16 (inclusive), the authors developed an innovative formative peer review assessment strategy to build undergraduate students' academic writing skills within the framework of a second year introductory International Politics module. This involved students anonymously reviewing assigned fellow students' draft essay introductions and indicative bibliographies, supported by a bespoke rubric delivered via Turnitin Peermark. This article recounts the educational research-driven rationale underpinning the peer review educational design and implementation in the International Politics module, before qualitatively exploring its perception and reception by learners through key 'student voice' data, complemented by commentary from learner focus groups. Following the best traditions of learning and teaching articles in this journal, we conclude by sharing the challenges and benefits of implementing such a formative assessment strategy. We also offer practice-based advice, based on our experiences, for colleagues who may want to emulate our approach, and acknowledge the limitations of our qualitative practice-based study alongside a potential avenue for expanding on this study.

### *Keywords*

Teaching, methods, course design, formative assessment, peer review, academic writing, academic literacies

## *Introduction*

In session 2010-11, the authors taught a second year undergraduate International Politics module at two different campus sites. During the assessment process, we reflected on our shared concerns that students' essay and exam performance on the module, but also on its host Social Science degree framework more generally, could be improved. These reflections centred on two particular aspects of students' academic writing: structure in essay / exam answer introductions, and regarding the breadth, depth and relevance of reading and referencing underpinning these essays and exam answers.

Our preoccupation was with the underlying quality of our students' reading and writing, more than their summative assessment marks themselves. This led us to consider more formative approaches to tackling the issues in partnership with the learners. Here, Beaman's (1998: 58) injunction that a driving principle of adult learning should be the involvement of students in self-assessment was a key premise for the task of devising such a formative assessment. This aspiration was also aligned with the University of the West of Scotland's then Learning, Teaching and Assessment Strategy, now the Education Enabling Plan (Anonymous a, 2015). We consulted literature on undergraduate writing, drawing particular inspiration from Read et al's (2001) work, which emphasises (among other useful if more general insights) the difficulty many students have in understanding the 'rules of the game' in structuring and presenting formal written assignments.

This insight seemed especially relevant to the International Politics cohort, which contained a large proportion of students from 'non traditional' backgrounds as well as recent school-leavers, who shared similar challenges in these areas of academic writing practice. We also had to consider how such 'rule-learning', as well

as confidence-building might be best supported in the context of an approach appropriate to the time and resource constraints of a module taught within a 12 week trimester across two campus sites. The second author had successful experience of a form of peer-marking in the context of a smaller, specialist, final year honours Political Islam module. This suggested that an adapted, level-appropriate and formative version of peer review could be a useful way forward in the context of the International Politics module. A vital, if challenging, aspect of such adaptation would be scaling up for a larger, cross-campus student cohort. As a large, second year second trimester undergraduate cross-campus class, requiring close staff collaboration, International Politics' students were ideally placed to experience innovative formative assessment feedback as they transitioned towards the upper levels of degree study.

Feedback, of course, is a critical area for development not just in politics studies but more generally. Blair and McGinty (2013: 67) have highlighted the centrality of assessment feedback to broader concerns about enhancing teaching quality. The same authors noted that peer feedback represented one potential means of making feedback more timely and meaningful to students (ibid: 71). The overarching aim of the peer review approach on our module was to deploy a carefully calibrated and timed version of peer assessment in order to help improve students' academic writing and reading. This could improve their wider academic performance at a critical juncture in their undergraduate studies.

It was felt that introductions and indicative bibliographies represented an ideal focus for the peer assessment. This was due to the teaching team's agreement that many of the weakest written submissions they marked tended to be characterised by unfocused or entirely missing introductions limited reading. Similarly, weaker essays

and exams tended in our experience to have ‘stunted’ bibliographies; with too few items and an over-reliance on sources not subject to academic peer review. We therefore surmised that helping students to develop their skills in these areas would benefit their work in a way that made effective use of the limited time and resources available given the cohort size and staff-student ratio. This is to say that for smaller classes we would not rule out peer review of entire essays, subject to intended learning outcomes on a given module.

The availability of Turnitin Peermark within the module VLE (Moodle) consequently looked to be a useful delivery mechanism for this formative assessment. Yet further reading and reflection was needed to align our aspirations for students with the literature on peer review in general, as well as with Turnitin Peermark’s specific capabilities. Here, a focused review of teaching and learning scholarship helped in refining the our thinking about peer review. It also reaffirmed its appropriateness, suitably adapted, for the challenges faced by students on International Politics specifically, and the class’s host social science degree framework more generally.

What follows is structured in three parts. First, we relate the educational design adopted in the use of this peer review approach, with reference to key theories. Second, we explore the approach’s impact on the International Politics module results and students’ perceptions of this formative assessment. Lastly, we reflect on the benefits and challenges associated with this formative assessment, sharing key insights to help fellow practitioners successfully adopt similar approaches in their own politics teaching. Acknowledging that our practice-based qualitative study has its limitations, we also indicate the potential benefits of a more robust quantitative

approach that other researchers might take to measure the impact of undergraduate peer review on student success.

### *Educational design and assessment regime*

What was the theoretical underpinning for the peer review formative assessment? Cornell University's Centre for Teaching Innovation (Anonymous b, 2013) highlights that peer assessment has many benefits. Most relevant to the case of the International Politics cohorts, it can empower students, motivating them to engage more deeply with course material, developing lifelong assessment skills, and promoting the free exchange of ideas. Especially relevant practical advice from this source focused on targeting peer assessment on assignments where students are most likely to benefit from it, and using bespoke rubrics to support and encourage the provision of relevant and constructive peer feedback. Regarding feedback quality, Bostock's work (2001: 2) highlights two key problems that may arise from using peer assessment:

- i) the variable quality of reviews among peers,
- ii) the challenge of grading accuracy (although Bostock notes that this is not unique to student peer reviews)

Bostock is clear, however, that neither of these difficulties are insurmountable, and that the anonymous distribution and exchange of reviews via an online resource such as a VLE (ibid: 3), combined with clear instructions and evaluation criteria for reviewers, can play major roles in overcoming them. Bostock explains that double-blind peermarking, analogous to journal article peer reviews, generally tends to encourage more accurate or honest feedback than might be the case in 'feedback pairs' of students known to each other. In this context, Bostock draws on Haaga (1993), whose work suggests there may be higher levels of 'inter-rater reliability' in

double-blind student peer reviews than in professional peer reviews. Merry and Orsmond (2004) discuss ways of carefully calibrating the review or marking criteria, and Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000: 33) note that the benefits of this precision also extend to formative assessments – such as was the case in the approach detailed in this article. Yet this kind of a approach has a wider justification in key intersecting literatures on academic writing / academic literacies, assessment *for* learning, and reflective practice, key influences from which are worth elaborating before detailing the specific educational design adopted for International Politics.

Throughout the development of this formative assessment we were cognisant of the development of the ‘academic literacies’ perspective on student writing in theory and practice (see for example Lillis, 2010), and as such were keen to promote learning through dialogue and peer interaction within a supportive framework, rather than to enforce students’ conformity with established or traditional ways of writing about politics and social science. To a major extent the aim was to instil a sense of what Fernsten and Reda (2011) term ‘writer self-awareness’ in the students, not simply for the module concerned but as they transitioned to higher levels of degree study . This can play into students’ self-regulation more widely (see Boud, 2007: 22). We argue, therefore, that judiciously designed undergraduate essay assignments remain an important opportunity for assessment *for* learning, as well as an opportunity to develop key employability competencies in a lifelong learning context . Boud is clear that assessments involving self and peer review *can* promote self-regulation but this is by no means automatic, and requires a conscious and explicit focus on this by staff, including highlighting the importance of ‘closing the feedback loop’ and critically using information from peers, rather than simply generating grades (ibid: 22). Self-regulation is defined by Zimmerman as the ‘self-directed’ or ‘proactive’



process through which learners ‘transform their mental abilities into academic skills’ (2002:65). ‘Closing the feedback loop’ is a term generally used in the context of students seeing action points derived from their feedback on learning experiences, but in the context of this peer review exercise refers to learners seeing their feedback from peer reviewers alongside their own self-review (see for example Watson, 2003). In short, the focus of the peer-review exercise on our module was aimed at improving students’ *process* of writing, reflecting and reasoning more than on simply – if helpfully - improving the quality of their essay as a product.

In devising and deploying what was in many respects an e-Learning intervention, we were acutely conscious of Diana Laurillard’s (2010) discouragement from using spurious technological bells and whistles, instead focusing on techniques and applications capable, when used judiciously, of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Here again, we were reminded of the importance of assessment *for* learning – also known as formative assessment (Anonymous c, last accessed April 2018). This describes a scenario where assessments form an integral, iterative and instrumental part of the learners’ lifelong journeys of continuous reflection and improvement. Its opposite would be viewing assessments as fixed points for the assignment of grades and the awarding of specific qualifications. Of course, it could be fairly questioned if these are truly mutually exclusive and dichotomous situations rather than different sides of the same coin. In any event, effective formative assessment strategies are typically characterised by the strategic use of questioning, effective teacher and peer feedback, student self-assessment and, finally, by making formative use of summative assessment. In other words, every opportunity is taken to promote learners’ reflection and improvement based on diverse sources of

assessment-generated evidence (ibid). Given the International Politics students' specific difficulties - noted above - with high-stakes academic writing in the form of their coursework and exam essays, there was a clear need to target the peer review exercise at a point in the module's delivery where they were most likely to benefit from it, developing the writer self-awareness and reflexivity needed to hone their work before its exposure to summative marking. Moreover, the exercise would need to embody explicit opportunities for reflection, questioning, constructive dialogue, and the process would need to strike the students as having intrinsic value in terms of their own self-development, rather than being of purely transactional use to them through allocating a mark. Nevertheless, it had to be recognised that many students – perhaps – ironically - those most likely to benefit from the invitation to reflect more deeply - would be reluctant to engage in an early non-summatively marked exercise without some transactional incentive. The agenda was altogether a challenging one, with much to balance and trade-off to achieve success.

Given these imperatives, we identified the build-up to students' coursework essay submissions (accounting for fifty per cent of their overall mark on the module; the remainder being taken up by the unseen end of trimester exam) as the most appropriate point to target the peer review exercise as a formative assessment. After writing their draft essay introductions and bibliographies and submitting these to Peermark, students were randomly and anonymously assigned two fellow learners' submissions, alongside their own, for review and self-assessment using a specialised rubric. Having conducted these peer and self-reviews, students were encouraged to incorporate the feedback comments they deemed most useful while preparing their full draft essays, which would be marked summatively by the module

lecturers. Engagement with the peer review component was incentivised by the award of ten percentage marks per student - equivalent to an additional grade for their coursework, subject to their full engagement with the exercise. To receive the additional marks, students were required to upload their draft introduction and indicative bibliography, and to complete two peer reviews and one self-review. Reflection on the merits of this incentive is, of course, offered in the concluding part of this article. It is important to acknowledge here that there are alternative means of incentivising engagement, such as deducting marks from students who do not engage fully.

Extensive written instructions ('storyboarding') and class time were set aside to overview and demystify the process for students (See figure 1 for student instructions). Staff wishing to use Turnitin Peermark (it should be emphasised that other VLE peermarking platforms are available) to set up such an exercise should consult the extensive guidance on setup available from Turnitin online (2018). This guidance includes the provision of a checklist giving examples of phrasing and signposting (making explicit the structure of the writing) techniques, which might be used within an effective essay introduction. The exercise was preceded with a brief in-class presentation (a copy of which was also provided on the VLE above the link for the exercise), covering the basic rationale for peer review and the questions reviewers would be asked to answer. The final slide made clear that engaging in peer review, as well as contributing to improved work, helps to develop key graduate skills, encourages self-reflection, and the development of 'soft skills' such as tact and diplomacy. In particular, students were asked to consider what sort of feedback *they* would prefer to receive, with regards tone and content. This discussion was complemented with a short (less than three minutes) Youtube video produced by

University of Minnesota's Writing Studies programme, which more fully explains and contextualises peer review for students, with particular reference to the importance of reviewing and rewriting (2013). Students were also provided with links to selected online study skills resources regarding the process of writing an introduction (see for example Pratt 2014).

The questions which reviewers were asked about their assigned draft introductions and bibliographies, including self-review of their own, were as below. To avoid simple yes / no responses, and to encourage fuller explanations of these, a minimum of ten words was required for each before Peermark would accept them. All questions addressed to the students in this exercise referred to the draft introduction and indicative bibliography. As the aim was to elicit qualitative feedback, students were not asked to grade each other.

- Does the introduction establish the context / background and / or importance of the topic?
- Does the introduction define the topic or key terms?
- Does the introduction state the purpose of the essay?
- Does the introduction provide an overview of the coverage and / or structure of the writing?
- Does the bibliography contain the correct number of items (5 – as this is indicative)?
- Is there a mix of sources?
- Does it follow Harvard conventions?

Having set out the key theoretical influences on, educational design and context for this formative assessment, the analysis turns to its effects on learning.

Following on from Boud's advice to focus on such formative assessments' effects on learner self-regulation rather than quantitative summative marks, the mainstay of the discussion here is on students' perceptions of the exercise's effects on their personal learning journeys. This is not to suggest quantitative results are unimportant – and indeed a descriptive overview of class results is provided below – but reflects the exercise's central formative design in the context of assessment *for* rather than of learning.

#### *Student Perceptions of the Peer Review Formative Assessment*

Given the effect of the addition of the ten percentage marks for those students (the overwhelming majority in each session after 2011-12) who fully engaged with the exercise by submitting their work for review and completing the peer and self reviews, it is almost impossible to distinguish between this and coursework essay marks improvements arising from the exercise's deeper metacognitive effects. However, the end of term exam marks are a possible crude proxy measure for such improvement, given their timing after the essay peer review and summative marking of 'final' essays with lecturer feedback, as well as the absence of an exam marks incentive equivalent to that offered on the essays. Here, the results post-implementation of the peer review exercise suggested an initial decrease (from twenty-three per cent of students failing the exam in 2011-2012 to three point nine two failing in 2012-2013, and then to one point seven five per cent failing in 2013-14, before rising to thirteen point seven per cent failing in 2014-2015 and nineteen point eight per cent failing in 2015-2016.. To rule out serendipity in this context, a full quantitative and longitudinal study would be needed to control for confounding variables such as cohort effects, other Moodle interventions and multifactorial interplay. Such an exercise falls outside the scope of this qualitative analysis of

learner perceptions of the peer review task on our module. This qualitative focus is justified given our exercise's 'academic literacies' underpinning, outlined above.

To explore learner perceptions of the exercise, formal 'student voice' feedback (headline results from university Module Evaluation Questionnaires or MEQs) was considered alongside bespoke learner focus groups in sessions 2014-2015 and 2015-2016. The university's annual module evaluation questionnaires ask students to evaluate a range of aspects of their module their overall module satisfaction with the class and the quality of assessment feedback. Throughout academic years 2011-2012 until the module's last presentation in 2015-2016, most respondents 'strongly agreed' that they were satisfied with the module overall, and with its assessment and feedback. Whilst the exact MEQ figures for academic years 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014 are no longer available, the 2014-15 and 2015-16 returns broadly align to the module's past performance, where institutional 'business intelligence' trendlines highlight most students agreeing or strongly agreeing that they were satisfied with the module overall and with its assessment and feedback. The available survey results were as follows. In academic year 2014–2015, eighty-seven point four per cent agreed or highly agreed that they were satisfied with their module experience; seventy-two per cent agreed or highly agreed that they were satisfied with the module's assessment and feedback. For 2015-16, ninety-four point four per cent agreed or highly agreed that they were satisfied with their module experience; seventy-one point six per cent agreed or highly agreed that they were satisfied with their assessment and feedback. Whilst qualitative comments were collected regarding what students 'liked and disliked' about the module, these tended not to focus on the peer assessment aspect directly.

Therefore, to delve deeper into learner perceptions of the peer review exercise, we conducted learner focus groups (FGs) with students who had undertaken the module and progressed into third year. These FGs were held during the summer of session 2014-2015, and findings were as follows.

#### Focus Group (FG) Research – International Politics’ Students Reflections on Peer Assessment Exercise

Hamilton Campus

3 participants, female (HF1; HF2; HF3)

Paisley Campus

5 participants, 3 male, 2 female (PM1; PM2; PM3; PF1; PF2)

All participants were Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) L9 (i.e. third year undergraduate) students who had studied the International Politics module in the preceding Academic Year.

This FG research was conducted to ascertain the perceptions of the peer component of assessment. Specifically, we were interested in academic skills acquisition focused on writer self-awareness, reflection and deepening students’ understanding of the importance of structure in writing. We devised our questions for learners based on these interests, and informed by the more ad hoc feedback arising from students’ qualitative comments (where relevant) arising from feedback received via the UWS module evaluation questionnaires for this module. This feedback was not tailored to the exercise, but most students in each delivery who did comment on the peer review exercise mentioned it as a positive factor in their module experience. Those who did

not saw it is 'extra work' or why marks should be given for 'free' - i.e. the ten percentage point incentive for engaging with the exercise.

After the FG rationale was explained to participants, the first question was to ascertain how many of the participants engaged in the peer component of assessment. All participants had contributed (N=8).

The next question was to ascertain the reasons for engaging with the peer component. Initially, all participants stated that they undertook this as they were given ten additional marks for engaging with peer assessment (N=8). As one participant noted "...it would be silly not to do it if you were getting 10 marks" (HF1). One student was very hostile to the concept of peer assessment, noting that "... it is lecturing staff who get paid to assess work, not students" (PM1). This view did not appear to be shared with the rest of the participants, as there was no non-verbal or verbal agreement and the issue did not arise at Hamilton Campus.

A number of participants intimated that they would have completed the peer component, regardless of the marks incentive (HF1; HF2; HF3; PM2; PF1). The reasons given for this more intrinsic rather than transactional motivation were that the exercise provided an opportunity to start the assessment work earlier than they might normally have, and felt that it was a good learning opportunity. They were also interested to see other students work. The more highly motivated learners were happy to engage with the peer review element. For instance, one student quipped that "I would be happy with [just] a free pen or something" (HF2). One more transactional participant reiterated that they only participated to gain the marks and they didn't put much effort into the process (PM3).



In relation to the peer feedback of their own work, very few of the participants found it useful. One participant noted that they wouldn't "...listen to someone who wasn't qualified to give feedback" (PM1). In a similar vein, another commented: "I wouldn't trust someone else's judgement" (HF2). Another comment was "...peer feedback wasn't useful but the kick up the backside to get started on the assessment was very useful" (PF2). Another comment was that "...[other] folks would be reading it so put [more than usual] effort into it" (PF1). Someone questioned the level of commitment some students demonstrated: "How do you review someone's work when they have only written a sentence?" (HF2) and "What do you do if the work is a pile of pants" [i.e. not very good]? (PM2). In terms of providing peer feedback to others, one participant stated that they "...didn't want to appear a know-it-all and tell someone else what to do. We shouldn't be doing this" (PM1).

Generally, participants found the sourcing of reading materials and compiling an indicative bibliography aspect of the assessment to be helpful. One commented that they were able to use peer bibliography to locate other relevant literature, so it was useful to share material (PF1). Others spent longer locating sources now / found these first before starting assessment (HF1; HF2). This indicated that their practice in this area had improved, becoming more intentional, as a result of engaging with the peer review exercise. Again, this view was not unanimous, as one more individualistic and transactional participant noted that they wouldn't divulge their "...best journal articles, because other students could then access the material" (PM1).

In terms of developing academic skills (and facilitating the transition from L8 to L9 study) the general feeling among participants was that engagement in the peer

assessment process had made them more reflective learners. Comments such as “...[the peer review assessment] helped me to see how other people tackled the work and made me think about structure and content – I didn’t really think about these things when I was writing an essay before” (HF3) and “I wish other people had engaged more fully but it did make me think about what I had written. I’m better at writing introductions now...” (PF1) indicate that the process has some merits. Furthermore, one participant noted that “Peer review has helped me to give opinions which has made me more confident” (HF3).

In the FG’s final phase, participants were asked to comment on whether or not the peer assessment had been, generally, a positive or negative experience. The majority found it to be a positive experience (HF1; HF2; HF3; PF1; PF2; PM2) although two participants did not view the assessment positively (PM1; PM3). When asked to reflect on the impact on critical self-reflection and writing skills, one participant noted that it had made them more aware of the “...audience that they were producing assessments for” (HF3). This statement resonates with the concept of ‘writer self awareness’ discussed above. A number of students felt that sourcing materials early on in the assessment cycle was very valuable and they had continued this practice in later work (HF1; HF2; PF1; PH2; PM2). The assessment also made many FG participants more aware of the importance of essay structure, rather than just focusing on subject content (HF1; HF2; HF3; PF1; PF2; PM2). One participant stated that they now continued to use the peer assessment introduction guidelines provided for this exercise for all their essay assessments (PF1).

The participants were asked to consider ways in which the assessment could be improved. One participant argued that the logic of this exercise should be taken further and that there should therefore be student involvement in the design of all

module assessments (HF2). Most participants stated that a greater level of commitment to the peer review from all students would have enhanced the experience (except PM1 and PM3). Some participants suggested that group-work or face-to-face peer review might work better than electronically mediated peer review on a VLE, but this position was contested and no consensus or unanimous decision was reached. While the FG participants were not unanimous about this, the broad agreement that the exercise was a worthwhile one which had benefited them in ways they had not initially foreseen. The analysis now turns to the teaching team's reflections on the exercise and its possible use by fellow practitioners.

*Conclusion: The Teaching team's reflections and suggestions based on their experience of undergraduate peer review on the IP Module*

We began conceived of and developed this peer review exercise because we identified an opportunity to support our International Politics students to refine and strengthen their academic writing and research skills. In designing and implementing the exercise, we found that while it did indeed help students to progress in these key areas of their academic practice, there were deeper, albeit less straightforwardly measurable benefits for those engaging with the exercise. These benefits focused on self-reflection, writer self-awareness and collaborative partnership working between students. These benefits reflect much of the literature on assessment *for* learning / formative assessment and peer review, but it was gratifying to see them emerge in our own professional practice for the benefit of our learners. We would certainly encourage fellow practitioners to adopt similar approaches in their modules, but would emphasise a number of practical and conceptual considerations that should be taken into account whilst designing and developing such an undergraduate peer

review assessment. This is particularly important in the prevailing Higher Education climate of high student numbers, high student-staff ratios, proliferating performance indicators and a target-driven culture, where tuition fees risk encouraging a more transactional mentality amongst students than may previously have been the case.

Our experience on this module indicates that such exercises, when carefully designed and calibrated to students' level of study and positioned ahead of a key summative assessment, can be a highly effective means of promoting genuine, if electronically mediated, collaboration and supportive partnership between students. To promote this partnership and collaboration, it is essential to support a clear understanding of what is required from each learner in terms of preparation of and engagement with the peer review process. Such 'storyboarding' should begin at the outset of the module, and be reflected in its supporting documentation (i.e. module handbooks and assessment information on the VLE). Class time should be set aside to demonstrate the process and how the various stages will appear to students on the module VLE, with the opportunity to ask questions and allay any arising concerns or queries.

Regarding the VLE implementation of the peer review exercise, it is essential for module teams to ensure that they are familiar with their chosen eLearning platform and its peer review options, so that they can make judicious and informed decisions about how it will be used to support their learning design. We would highly recommend that academic staff take advantage of any available ICT support infrastructure in their institution to ensure that technical glitches can be swiftly overcome, especially given the volume of student communication (typically email-based) that may arise in the event of even the most minor such difficulty arising.

On this note, we would also advise academic staff to carefully time their module's peer review and summative assessment deadlines such as to allow a long 'lead-in' time for systems testing. In classes, such as that described above, with large student numbers which are most likely to need a VLE-mediated form of peer review, it would be realistic for academic staff to expect an increased volume of student queries /emails for the duration of the peer review assessment's availability within the module's teaching schedule. This additional work, whilst challenging, is in our experience worthwhile, given the benefits associated with this form of assessment design. In short, peer assessment reduces marking and feedback for staff at one end of the scale, but it does not reduce workload overall. Staff should weigh carefully the benefits and drawbacks of using such an approach. Peer assessment is certainly no more an educational panacea than any other form of assessment, notwithstanding its undoubted merits when used appropriately.

The use of a marks incentive to encourage engagement with the peer review assessment was justified in our approach because of its increasing the likelihood of more transactional and / or less attentive students participating in an exercise with the potential to enhance their academic practice. Such students were unlikely to have engaged with the exercise otherwise. We recognise that many academic staff may regard this as a perverse incentive for student engagement, which should have its own intrinsic rewards. Indeed we retain some sympathy with this stance. Nevertheless, we would argue that it was appropriate for this exercise given the context of promoting enhanced practice and reflection among relatively junior (SCQF level 8 / second year) undergraduate students. The use and extent of any such incentive should be the result

of careful deliberation by teaching teams developing peer review assessments, and we would by no means advocate a one-size-fits-all approach.

Our professional experience of this form of undergraduate peer review over the period covered in this article indicates its effectiveness in promoting better undergraduate writing and research practice, as well as encouraging learner reflection. Our own reflection on the process whilst writing it up for publication leads us to conclude that the next stage in its development should more firmly foreground the metacognitive aspects of the exercise. It should also foreground the connections to lifelong learning and employability within the exercise itself. This refinement will include the inclusion of questions such as:

- What do you think you have learned from engaging in this form of peer review?

We would also encourage colleagues considering such exercises to engage with quantitative methodologists and university ethics committees as early as possible in the development process. This will facilitate gathering more robust data on the impact of engagement with peer review on student success (i.e. comparing ‘treatment’ with ‘non-treatment’ samples). Of course, there remains a place for eliciting students’ qualitative reflections on their experiences of formative assessment in any further studies, as grades can only measure so much in the context of learning. These desiderata aside, our experience of designing, implementing and qualitatively evaluating this particular exercise with our students suggests that peer review is a valuable and potentially (subject to quantitative research and testing as discussed above) essential formative assessment tool. Some form of peer review should therefore be strongly considered for use by all political science educators and learners.

[As an afterword, it should be noted that a programme-wide curriculum redesign has seen the recent replacement of the module concerned. The peer review assessment is a key element of best practice that has been replicated in a successor module, Power, State and Citizenship, delivered from academic year 2016-17 onwards. This new module is delivered using an interdisciplinary (specifically, political sociology) approach, and we would hope to share further reflections derived from the replication of this formative assessment on it after its 2018-19 delivery.]

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**Table 1: Module Results by academic year and campus**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>				<b>2012-2013</b>				<b>2013-2014</b>				<b>2014-2015</b>				<b>2015-16</b>			
<b>Campus</b>	Hamil ton (N=59)		Pais ley (N=96)		Hamil ton (N=47)		Pais ley (N=55)		Hamil ton (N=45)		Pais ley (N=69)		Hamil ton (N=50)		Pais ley (N=81)		Hamil ton (N=23)		Pais ley (N=83)	
<b>Grade / Assignment</b>	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am
<b>A</b>	1	1	5	2	4	0	8	2	9	2	8	2	7	0	14	3	8	0	23	2
<b>B1</b>	4	7	27	15	22	7	28	17	19	17	28	17	13	8	32	10	6	7	27	14
<b>B2</b>	32	20	48	43	13	21	15	23	8	23	15	23	19	25	18	38	6	8	12	27
<b>C</b>	14	11	14	20	2	11	4	12	5	12	4	12	7	12	4	15	2	5	10	19
<b>FAIL</b>	8	20	2	16	6	8	0	1	4	1	0	1	4	5	10	13	1	2	12	19

**Table 2: Participation Levels in Peer Review Exercise by Academic Year**

Academic Year	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16
Participation in Peer Review Exercise	96%	Data no longer available (software issue)	89%	89%

**Table 3: Total number and percentage of students at both campuses failing exam each academic year**

<u>Year</u>	2011-2012 (n155)	2012-2013 (n102)	2013-2014 (n114)	2014-2015 (n131)	2015-2016 (n106)
Number (Percentage)	36 (23%)	4 (3.92%)	2 (1.75%)	18 (13.7%)	21 (19.8%)



Figure 1: Student Instruction Screenshot

11:48


File

Module: International Politics

### Assessment 2


 **Writing an Introduction** 18.4KB Word document 

Here are some points to consider when writing essay introductions. This will help you to improve and gain confidence in your academic writing style.


 **Introduction Submission**

Please submit your assessment here for peer review, do this by clicking the link above and following the instructions. There are no extensions allowed so ensure that you submit as early as possible. **The last submission time is 15:00 on the 25 March 2013.**



Note: if you do not submit an introduction by the deadline, you will not be able to take part in the stage of the assessment.

 **Introduction Peer Review**

You must submit your introduction to the assessment link above prior to completing this stage. This stage is peer review. You are required to click the link above and provide feedback on 2 other student's submissions using the marking scheme provided. You will then be required to review and provide feedback on your own submission. **Please undertake this part of the assessment between 26 March 00.01 and 8 April 15:00.**

 **Final Submission**

Your final essay should be submitted here by 15:00 on 29 April 2013.

 **Hamilton Essay Submission (12131731)** 

Students based at Hamilton, please submit here.

*Restricted: 'Available from 22 April 2013 to 21 July 2013.'*

**Table 1: Module Results by academic year and campus**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>2011-2012</b>				<b>2012-2013</b>				<b>2013-2014</b>				<b>2014-2015</b>				<b>2015-16</b>			
<b>Campus</b>	Hamil ton (N=59)		Pais ley (N=96)		Hamil ton (N=47)		Pais ley (N=55)		Hamil ton (N=45)		Pais ley (N=69)		Hamil ton (N=50)		Pais ley (N=81)		Hamil ton (N=23)		Pais ley (N=83)	
<b>Grade / Assignment</b>	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am	Essa y	Ex am	Ess ay	Ex am
<b>A</b>	1	1	5	2	4	0	8	2	9	2	8	2	7	0	14	3	8	0	23	2
<b>B1</b>	4	7	27	15	22	7	28	17	19	17	28	17	13	8	32	10	6	7	27	14
<b>B2</b>	32	20	48	43	13	21	15	23	8	23	15	23	19	25	18	38	6	8	12	27
<b>C</b>	14	11	14	20	2	11	4	12	5	12	4	12	7	12	4	15	2	5	10	19
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**Table 2: Participation Levels in Peer Review Exercise by Academic Year**

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**Table 3: Total number and percentage of students at both campuses failing exam each academic year**

<u>Year</u>	2011-2012 (n155)	2012-2013 (n102)	2013-2014 (n114)	2014-2015 (n131)	2015-2016 (n106)
Number (Percentage)	36 (23%)	4 (3.92%)	2 (1.75%)	18 (13.7%)	21 (19.8%)